

OMNI

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From: Lenling, Amy
Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2002 5:24 PM
To: Arwady, Marjorie D.; Carchman, Loreen; Carcich, Claire; Counts, Mary Ellen; Desel, Paula; Lewis, Jane Y.; Murillo, Joe; Neidle, Bruce L.; Nelson, Christopher (PMMC); Osborne, Kevin (PMMC Legal); Patskan, George J.; Podraza, Ken F.; Reininghaus, Wolf; Roethig, Hans; Suter, Eric; Walk, Roger A.; Whidden, Roger
Subject: Vector seeks USDA action on bio-tobacco

The below article states that Vector tobacco has sent a petition to the US Agriculture Department to stop regulating field tests of their genetically engineered tobacco saying the plant "poses no risk to other crops." Also, please note, Vector plans to release its reduced-nicotine cigarette in the 2nd quarter of this year.

Tuesday February 12, 4:16 pm Eastern Time

CORRECTED - Vector seeks USDA action on bio-tobacco

In WASHINGTON story headlined "Vector seeks USDA action on bio-tobacco," in fourth paragraph please read "... is engineered to disrupt a plant's normal production of nicotine," instead of "... is engineered to produce an acid to disrupt a plant's normal production of nitrosamines." (Corrects reference to acid and nitrosamines).

A corrected repeat follows:

WASHINGTON, Feb 12 (Reuters) - Vector Group Ltd. has asked the U.S. Agriculture Department to stop regulating field tests of a genetically engineered tobacco the company has developed with sharply reduced nicotine, saying the plant poses no risk to other crops, the USDA said on Tuesday.

Vector owns the Liggett Group, the fifth-largest U.S. tobacco maker. The biotech tobacco is part of the company's efforts to develop new products that are less harmful to smokers.

A company spokeswoman said Vector aims to roll out the new cigarette in the second quarter of this year.

The tobacco plant, known as Vector 21-41, is engineered to disrupt the plant's normal production of nicotine. The end result is trace amounts of nicotine in a cigarette, the USDA said in a Federal Register notice.

Nicotine is widely viewed as the addictive element in cigarettes.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service supervises field tests that look for any potential harm to the environment from new biotech plants. Companies seeking to commercialize a product typically ask the USDA to grant unregulated status after providing scientific evidence that a gene-spliced plant poses no hazard to other crops.

Vector asked the USDA last May to stop regulating the new tobacco, which has been grown in field tests since 1999.

Industry, environmental and consumer groups have until April 15 to comment on Vector's request, the USDA said.

After denying any health risks from smoking for decades, U.S. tobacco companies were stung into action several years ago by a series of lawsuits from sick smokers and dozens of states to recover taxpayer funds spent caring for the sick and dying.

The new product is designed to go a step beyond a cigarette called Omni that Vector introduced last November which uses tiny amounts of the rare metal palladium to act as a kind of catalytic converter in removing harmful ingredients from tobacco.

Some consumer groups have criticized the Omni cigarette, saying the company's health claims are misleading, deter smokers from quitting and encourage new smokers to start because they believe it is safer. The groups want Congress to give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration full authority over the manufacturing and sale of tobacco products, including health claims about them.